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ABSTRACT

A study examined how reading teachers' reading habits impacted their teaching practices. Subjects, 625 teachers who attended the Book and Author Luncheon at the 1993 International Reading Association in San Antonio, completed a survey. Teachers represented all 50 states and Canada. Results indicated that: (1) the majority of the teachers viewed themselves as avid readers who read many books and kept up with professional journals; (2) few teachers read journals about book lists and reviews on a regular basis; (3) they are still very concerned about the discrepancy between reading/writing instructional outcomes in the classroom and the competency based minimal skills testing; (4) their reading pedagogy was based upon what they know good readers do rather than explicitly including methods which would motivate reluctant readers; and (5) they knew least about working with aliterate or unmotivated readers. Findings suggest that as instruction is changed to accommodate the aliterate/reluctant reader, it might be beneficial to include more nonfiction, more active, hands-on learning literacy activities, and more reader response fostering reading/writing as a social activity. (RS)

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TEACHERS AS READERS: SURVEY OF TEACHER PERSONAL READING HABITS AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASSROOM

(RUNNING HEAD: READING TEACHER SURVEY)

PAPER PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF NATIONAL READING
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TEACHERS AS READERS: SURVEY OF TEACHER PERSONAL READING HABITS AND
LITERACY ACTIVITIES IN THE CLASSROOM

In a recent speech, Rexford Brown stated that a classroom is only as literate as the teacher in the classroom. His statement should instill confidence, for it is certainly the ideal that all classrooms be led by teachers who are not only dedicated to the children they teach, but are also dedicated to the subjects they teach. Such communication, it is hoped, would mean on-going learning through self-study and continued education. At the very least, teachers would stay literate in their fields by reading current journals and books on their topics. This reading would help create those literate classrooms to which Brown referred.

But is this the case? Are teachers readers? Do they read to stay current with their subject matter? More specifically, do literature and reading teachers, those very people who spend their days teaching the skill of and imparting the love of reading spend their nights reading themselves? Is a teacher of reading a reading teacher?

These questions led us to wonder what teachers' personal reading habits and attitudes were. Furthermore, we wondered if those habits had any impact or influence on their teaching practices. Teachers are well informed of reader preferences and habits (Abrahamson & Shannon, 1983; Carter & Harris, 1987; Kutiper, 1985; Livaudais, 1985; Purves & Beach, 1976; Terry, 1974; Trelease, 1989). What is unknown, though, is how teachers' reading habits impact their teaching practices.

To begin to answer those questions, we surveyed 625 teachers who attended the Book and Author Luncheon at the 1993 International Reading Association (IRA) in San Antonio. Those 625 teachers represented all 50 states as well as Canada. A look at their educational and teaching backgrounds indicates that the group was well-educated, and current in children's and adolescents' literature, students' reading

habits and preferences, and current pedagogy. Sixty-five percent had taught 13 years or more with 64% holding a master's or doctoral degree. Additionally, 50% of those surveyed had attended five or more conventions or workshops in the past three years.

The survey instrument was initially piloted in a large district in Texas and then at an IRA reading council breakfast in Houston with 500 teachers before being administered at the International Reading Association luncheon. The following offers a look at what these teachers said they do and don't read.

What Professional Journals Do Reading Professionals Read?

To answer this question, respondents were presented with a list of eleven journals plus a place to write additional journals. They were to indicate which journals they read and how often they read them (regularly, sometimes, rarely, never). As we were surveying teachers attending an IRA convention, we weren't surprised that the journals read most frequently were IRA journals: Reading Teacher was read regularly or sometimes by 70% of the group. Forty percent read Reading Today and/or Journal of Reading regularly or sometimes. Other similar types of journals were read rarely or never: Horn Book, The New Advocate, School Library Journal, English Journal, and Booklist. However, more than 50% of the teachers indicated they sometimes read Language Arts, Learning, and/or Teaching K-8.

How Many Books Do Reading Professionals Read during their Free Time in a Year?

The majority (77%) of the teachers viewed themselves as avid readers, while 23% viewed themselves as dormant readers (They like to read, but currently don't make time to do so.). Some 60% reported that they had read between one and six adult books in the past year, 30% indicated they had read over 13 adult books and 62% had read over 16 new children's and/or young adult's books within the past year. Thus, it appears that our respondents read children's, young adults' and adults' books to keep abreast of current literature. The interesting aspect of this was the low number of respondents who circled reading journals about book lists and reviews to keep current on what is published. Obviously teachers are getting book information from somewhere else, possibly through local IRA councils, through word of mouth or through workshops in local areas.

What Are Teachers Reading Aloud to their Classes?

As teachers listed their favorite authors and books to share with their classes, it was interesting to see that the authors and titles rarely related. In other words, titles listed as favorites were seldom by the favorite authors. The six top ranked picture book authors were: Bill Martin Jr., Eric Carle, Tomi De Paola, Alike, Beverly Cleary, and Steven Kellogg, while the top chapter book authors were Katherine Patterson, Judy Blume, Gary Paulsen and Patricia MacLachlan. Book title favorites in rank order are as follows: Brown Bear Brown Bear, Charlotte's Web, Polar Express, Love You Forever, Sarah Plain and Tall, Very Hungry Caterpillar, Chicka Chicka Boom Boom, The Giving Tree, and Where the Red Fern Grows.

With What Objectives Do Teachers Spend the most Instructional Time, and Which One Do They Believe to be the most Important?

While teachers marked "fostering positive attitudes" and "sharing good literature" as their two most important objectives, they are still spending 50% to 70% teaching decoding, comprehension, and vocabulary skills. Thus, there is a discrepancy between what they think is important and how they actually spend their time.

What Were the most Pressing Concerns of these Teachers?

Teachers responded that there was great concern over the use of whole language or literature based reading/writing in the classroom and the subsequent assessment through the existing competency based minimum skills tests required by many state and local education agencies. When ranking the other concerns listed in the questionnaire the following results indicated that school funding ranked below the assessment and whole language issue, followed by lack of parental support, lack of administrative support, and personal salary. Interestingly, discipline of students ranked at the bottom of their concerns.

What Areas Do Teachers Feel the Most and Least Degree of Competence?

Finally, Teachers indicated that they still have less knowledge of portfolio assessment, response-centered reading, and ways to motivate reluctant readers. The techniques they used most in the classroom to motivate readers are: reading aloud in an excited voice, sharing new books, and sharing a variety of genre, while the methods that were used least were discussing books with groups, showing movies

related to books, and involving students in art activities, and drama. These responses indicate that teachers are still not using what we know reluctant readers need — hands-on, activity-centered reading rather than passively listening and discussing books (Beers, 1990).

Conclusion

In conclusion, teachers who attended the IRA Book and Author Luncheon representing all 50 states were avid readers who read many books, and kept up with Journal of Reading or Reading Teacher. However, they do not read booklists or reviews on a regular basis. They are still very concerned about the discrepancy between reading/writing instructional outcomes in the classroom and the competency based minimal skills testing. They also indicate to us that their reading pedagogy is based upon what they know good readers do rather than explicitly including methods which would motivate the reluctant readers. They also indicated that they knew least about working with the aliterate or unmotivated reader. As we change our instruction to accommodate the aliterate/reluctant reader it might be beneficial to include more nonfiction, more active, hands-on learning literacy activities, and more reader response fostering reading/writing as a social activity. Jane Hansen's recent case study report at NCTE 1993, indicated that the social aspect of literacy was one of the three more powerful components of building a literacy identity. Finally, by making reading an interactive process, even aliterate, unmotivated readers can begin to apply reading in more meaningful ways.

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